

Measures taken by the Ministry of Justice of Georgia and the Special Penitentiary Service for the Prevention of Spreading COVID-19 in Georgian PEs

Introduction

Protection of the fundamental rights of the persons deprived of their liberty and operating in line with the highest European and International Standards, remains the key priority for Georgian Penitentiary System.

Ministry of Justice of Georgia and the Special Penitentiary Service are taking proactive measures in accordance with the recommendations of WHO and the Inter-Agency Coordination Council of the Government of Georgia chaired by the Prime-Minister for the prevention of spreading the COVID-19 within the penitentiary system. In this process, relevant national and international recommendations are taken into account in order to keep the balance between the fundamental rights of inmates and health and safety of the prison population/staff.

Special conditions within Special Penitentiary Service

Different proactive and COVID-19 preventive measures were imposed within the SPS:

- Director General announced the period of special conditions from March 5 till April 3, 2020;
- Visiting arrangements (short-term, long-term, family visits) have been restricted in PEs for convicts and remands. Inmates' rights to short leave from the facility and the right to temporary leave from the facility in case of special personal circumstances have also been restricted; However, in order to compensate the restrictions on visits, with the initiative of the Justice Minister, since March 16, inmates have 15 minutes free of charge phone calls; In case of emergency, the visits are held with a glass barrier and personal protective equipment; Investigators, advocates, prosecutors, experts are required to wear protective equipment whilst entering the PEs;
- Inmates placed in the pre-release facility are restricted to the right to leave the pre-release facility in case of study and/or work and on holidays as determined under the Georgian legislation;
- Newly arrived convicts/prisoners on remand are placed separately from other inmates.

As the Government of Georgia has announced State of Emergency on March 22, 2020, Special Penitentiary Service has taken additional preventive/protective measures by creating the amounts and lists of the staff (optimal number) of PEs who will not leave the PEs even after more restrictive circumstances are imposed, in case of such need.

Screening of newly arrived convicts/remands

- According to the joint order of the Minister of Justice of Georgia and the Minister of Internal Affairs of Georgia (adopted on March 12, 2020), if the person is transferred from TDIs to the PEs, the medical information concerning the suspicious symptoms of that person is delivered to the PEs;
- In “Recipient PEs”, where remand prisoners are placed first, medical examinations are held outside the PE building - in specially arranged medical point. The relevant staff is equipped with special cloths and inventory. If the remand prisoner has none of the symptoms and neither he/she nor his/her close relative has travel history in the near past, he/she is placed in so called quarantine zone for 21 days where he/she is examined on a daily basis. If the remand prisoner has got any suspicious symptom he/she will not be placed in PE and for further medical observation is transferred to the civil sector hospital in case of such need.

Screening of the Special Penitentiary Service Staff

- The staff of PEs are screened on a daily basis prior their entrance to the establishment. If the temperature or other suspicious symptoms are revealed the person is not allowed to enter the PE, he/she is given the relevant recommendations and are referred to the civil hospital;
- In order to prevent the possible spreading of COVID-19 in PEs, those doctor-specialists (consultants), who are also employed in civil hospitals, are no longer (temporarily) visiting PEs. In case the need of the inmate’s referral to civil hospital arises, such referral is made without any delays;
- Special emphasis is made on the medical examinations of vulnerable and risk category groups such as elders and inmates with prior health problems;
- Medical staff is available 24/7 in all PEs;
- PEs are provided with full supply of necessary medicine.

Equipment of the Special Penitentiary Service Staff

- The staff of PEs, including the staff working at medical points, are provided with all necessary equipment (special face masks, medical gloves, unitary gowns) and all the manipulations are conducted according to the relevant requirements and in line with the WHO recommendations;
- Entrances of relevant areas of each PE are equipped with disinfection barriers according to the sanitary-epidemiologic requirements;
- Medical units of each PE are provided with chemical solutions and personal protective equipment. Such equipment is accessible for inmates as well;
- Each PE is provided with hygienic and disinfection necessities that are available to the inmates and staff;
- Non-medical staff of PEs is also equipped with personal protective equipment.

Disinfection

For the prevention of potential spreading of new coronavirus (COVID-19), all 15 PEs and public reception areas are permanently disinfected since March 7, 2020:

Disinfection works are done in all areas of PEs, where the person coming from outside may appear. In particular, these areas cover public receptions, administrative buildings of PEs, medical units, short-term and long-term visiting facilities, investigation rooms and halls of living blocks. Used chemical solution has a long-lasting effect, however, disinfection will be done in PEs and public receptions again in case of such need. Special Penitentiary Service will take all the measures for protecting inmates as well as the staff from the potential risks of the new COVID-19.

Ensuring regular informing of the Staff and Inmates within PEs

- Recommendations of WHO on combating pandemic is available to the medical staff of PEs, also, the National Standard (protocol) on the Clinical Management of the Infection (COVID-19) evoked by the new Coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) as adopted by the Order of the Minister of IDPs, Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia on March 24, 2020, is also provided to the medical staff;
- Posters with information on hand washing techniques and other important aspects are placed in the entrances of the PEs;
- Every inmate is informed on the purposes and essence of the restrictions imposed on PEs as well as on the importance of protecting hygienic procedures.

Allocating spaces of PEs according to existing needs

Special blocks/buildings/spaces (so called “quarantine zones”) are designated for the “new comer prisoners”, where they are allocated for 21 days and only after this period and with all medical considerations will be placed with other inmates.

Ensuring distance court hearings

Special Penitentiary Service ensures conducting distance court hearings within PEs. For this reason all PEs have been properly equipped with specific techniques.